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SERMON CCCXCVI.

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THE DEATH OF A MOTHER.*

"I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother."—Psalm xxxv. 14.

THERE is a peculiarity in every kind of bereavement. There is enough to separate it from all other modes of trial, to produce a peculiar state of feeling, and to convey its own lessons to the soul distinct from those imparted by any other divine dispensation. The loss of a wife—a friend, a companion, a sympathiser in trials, a fellow-heir of the grace of life, a sharer of the joys and a divider of the sorrows of our pilgrimage; of a son who we hoped would be our stay and staff in old age, and perpetuate our name when we are dead; of a daughter whom we have tenderly nourished and tenderly loved; of a sister, the companion of the playful days of childhood, and a kind friend as she advanced with us to the maturity of life; of a father, the counsellor and guide of our youth—each one of these bereavements has its own sad lesson to convey to the soul; each one touches a cord in the heart which vibrates only then. It is a part of our duty and discipline here, carefully to gather up these lessons, and apply them to our own souls.

In the text it is supposed that the death of a mother affects those who are bereaved by her loss in a peculiar manner, and that such a loss is among the heaviest of sorrows. 'I bowed down *heavily*, as one that mourneth for his mother." To see the force of this text it is not necessary to suppose that this is the heaviest of *all* the sorrows which we can experience, nor is it necessary to make any comparison between this and the other forms of bereavement which we may be called to endure. All that is necessary to say is, that there are cords of the soul touched then which have

* Occasioned by the recent death of the author's mother.—*Editor.*

not been touched before, and which will not be again. *A man has but one mother to lose*; and *when* such an event occurs, it is well for him to endeavor to learn the lessons which God *once in his life* designs to teach him.

It is the duty of a minister of the gospel to adapt his teaching to all the relations of life, and to apply the lessons of religion to the various circumstances in which his hearers may be placed. At no one time indeed can it be supposed that any considerable part of his audience will feel an immediate interest in a topic of this kind; but there are usually enough who have been recently afflicted in this manner to make such a topic of public discourse proper. Besides, how large a portion in a congregation, is there who have at some time been thus bereaved! How many are there here to-day, who at some period of their lives have known what it was to lose a mother! It will be no injury to recall the memory of that scene—not for the purpose of opening wounds again which time and religion may have healed—but to make more fresh in the recollection the lessons which God designed to convey by the living virtues, and by the death of a mother. It may be useful too to those who *have* mothers from whom they may soon be called to part, to contemplate this relation, and to be told of the kind of emotions which spring up in the soul when a parent is taken away to be seen no more. It may teach you to prize their counsels and their friendship more; it may make you more careful not to pain their hearts by unkindness or disobedience.

I shall make no comparison between this relation and that of a father. *That* is in many respects as important and as influential as this; and when that is sundered, the bereavement as much demands the tribute of our tears, and conveys as important lessons to the soul. Perhaps in some cases there may be more to affect the heart in such a loss—for some of us may owe more to the inherited mental characteristics, and the example and the direct teaching of a father, than we do to a mother. But though this may be so, the remarks which I propose to submit to you now, will, I trust, be seen to be founded in truth. Without any very exact order, yet with such a general distribution of my thoughts as will be adapted, I hope, to make a distinct impression on the mind, I shall submit to you a few reflections on such a relation, and such a loss, which I trust may be fitted to be useful.

I. I need hardly say, that the relation of a mother is a *peculiar* relation, and has features which are found in no other. The tie is one which exists nowhere else; which can never be renewed; which when it is sundered is sundered for ever—unless it is cemented by religion, and grows up into eternal affection in the heavens.

Her affection for us began at a period of which we have no re-

collection, and when we were not conscious that any being loved us. It was laid far back in her nature, by a benignant Providence, to *anticipate* our helplessness and our wants as we came into the world. It began when as yet we had manifested no qualities of mind or heart to deserve affection; when we were incapable of returning the tokens of her love; when we could not give back the kiss that was so tenderly impressed upon us, and when it was certain that the expressions of her lavished affection could not be remembered by us should we ever reach a period when we would be capable of repaying appreciated kindness. It existed in her heart whatever we were to be, or whatever was to be our fortune in this world, and was *so strong* that even could she have foreseen all our ingratitude, and all that we might yet do to pain her, she would still have loved us, and perhaps her caresses would have been only the more tender while we were yet innocent, and our souls were uncontaminated by contact with evil. She met us as we entered on life already *prepared* to do us good. Her first emotion toward us was that of love; and even then—when we had no character, and no claim for services rendered; when we had furnished no evidence that we ever *would* be worthy of her love, or repay her kindness with anything but ingratitude, she was ready to do for us what we may have even now scarcely secured a friend to do by all our virtues. Not a friend have we now who would watch more patiently by our sick-bed than she would have done by our cradle then, nor have we one who would sorrow more sincerely over our grave This care we owed primarily to God, and under him to that affection which he had created in her heart.

> Unumbered comforts on my soul,
> Thy tender care bestowed,
> Before my infant heart conceived
> From whom those comforts flowed.

The affection thus laid in her heart to anticipate our necessities, was strengthened on her part by all her own toil, and care, and watchfulness, and sacrifices on our behalf. Whatever might be the effect on *us*, the effect on *her* was to make her love us more. Her own solicitude and toil became thus a measure of her augmented affection; for God has instructed us to love that much which is the fruit of sacrifice and toil. Her love for us was measured far more by her own sacrifices than by our own worth, or by any developed traits of character which seemed to justify her ardor of affection, though it *was* also strengthened on her part by every thing in us—then estimated perhaps at more than twice its value—which seemed to reward her care. On *our* part the attachment formed is not that which grows out of favors *rendered*, but favors *received*. It is laid indeed in nature; but it grows up and expands because we *receive* so many benefits; because there is such an

obligation of gratitude; because we learn more and more, as we advance in years, how much we owe to a mother.

The attachment for a mother is different from that which we have for a brother or sister. That may be exceedingly tender and pure. Indeed there is nothing *more* pure in our relations than love for a sister. But it is formed in a different way. When the tie which binds us to her is severed, it cannot indeed be renewed; it makes a sad desolation in the soul; but it is not precisely the sorrow which we have when we 'bow down heavily, mourning for a mother.' We love a sister for we began life together, under the same roof, under the fostering care of the same parents. We played together in childhood; we shared the same gentle amusements; we went to the same school; we had the same father to counsel and guide us; and had the same mother to teach us to pray, and to give us the parting kiss at night. We grew up equally beloved by our parents, and we have learned to love each other much by mutual acts of affection and kindness.

The attachment is different from those friendships which we form as we advance in life. Those may be dear, and they may be stronger than that which binds to a mother, but they are not the same. A man leaves father and mother and cleaves to his wife with an affection more tender and strong than that formed by any natural relation, but it is not the same. He forms strong friendships in life—like that which bound the heart of David and Jonathan, but such friendships did not begin as we entered on life, nor imbed themselves in the soft heart of infancy and childhood, nor are they cemented by so many acts of kindness.

The attachment to a mother is different from that which we form for our children. It is what we expect *of* them, rather than what we feel *for* them. We love them much—even as she did us. But it is a love for them as *our* children; as dependent on us; as helpless; as needing our care and counsel; as a part of ourselves; as those who we hope will do us honor when we are dead. These attachments which we form in after life, of nature and affection, are strong and tender; they may be more immediately tender than those which we bear for a parent; grief may be more poignant when they are sundered by death, and when we follow wife or child to the grave, but it has its own features, distinct from that when a venerable and much loved parent is conveyed to the tomb. As there was a peculiarity of attachment, so there will be a peculiarity of sorrow such as we are not to experience again.

II. I notice a second peculiarity of feature in this kind of bereavement. It is in the change which is produced in our ideas of *home*—the home of our childhood and youth. When *she* lived there, there was always a home—a place which in every situation of life we felt was such, and which we regarded as such.

In our childhood and youth, there was in that home where she was, one who always cared for us, and for all that appertained to us. There was one who, we were sure would take an interest in everything that we took an interest in, and whose ear we were certain would be open to listen to all our tales of childish success, or of childish trouble. We were sure that she would take the same interest in it which we did, and we expected confidently that whoever might be against us, she would be for us. We never had a doubt that she would listen to our tale of fright, of disappointment, of calamity; nor that she would feel just as we did about it. The matter might be in itself important, or unimportant; it might be dignified or undignified, yet we never doubted that she would regard it as important, and as sufficiently momentous to claim her attention. We might have felt that it was not grave enough to tell a father about; we might have doubted whether he would suspend his more weighty employments to interest himself in our affairs; but we never had such a doubt for a moment about a mother. No matter what her employments, or her cares, or what she might be interested in, we were sure that she would be interested in us, and that, in all our troubles, we should find her our friend. We had our difficulties in the little world of childhood. Bigger and older boys struck us; or laughed at us; or reviled us, or surpassed us in learning, in running, or in skill, and in that little world we might have found no sympathy, and there was no one there to whom we could unburden an aching heart. But we were sure that there was one who *would* sympathise with us, and who would be on our side. Our playmates derided us, and laughed at us because we said, in our simplicity, that we 'would tell our mother.' And yet it was philosophy deep and pure to do so—like the pure crystal spring that breaks out of the side of a hill in the uncultivated forest. It was what nature prompted to—for nature designed that she should know our troubles, and nature had formed for us such a friend there, that, whoever was against us, we knew that she would be on our side; whoever wronged us, she would not; whoever exulted over us, she would not join in the exultation. You may say that this is *childish* philosophy. So it may be—and the nearer our philosophy comes back to simple nature as developed there, the nearer we shall be to truth. In our troubles we have *always* needed a friend who would sympathise with us, and to whom we might unburden all the sorrows of the soul. The disciples of John's Redeemer 'came, and took up his murdered body, and buried it, *and went and told Jesus.*' Math. xiv. 12. In him they had a friend—tender and delicate above all a mother's feelings—who they were sure would sympathise with their sorrows; and what was more natural than that they should go and tell him? So in the home of our childhood, it was dear to us as a home, for there

was not a sorrow of our heart that we might not tell our mother.

Many of us—most of us who are advanced beyond the period of childhood, went out from that home to embark on the stormy sea of life. Of the feelings of a father, and of his interest in our welfare, we have never entertained a doubt, and our home was dear because he was there; but there was a peculiarity in the feeling that it was the home of our mother. While she lived there, there was a place that we felt was *home*. There was one place where we would always be welcome; one place where we would be met with a smile; one place were we would be sure of a friend. The world might be indifferent to us. We might be unsuccessful in our studies or our business. The new friends which we supposed we had made, might prove to be false. The honor which we thought we deserved, might be withheld from us. We might be chagrined and mortified by seeing a rival outstrip us, and bear away the prize which we sought; but there was a place where no feelings of rivalry were found, and where those whom the world overlooked would be sure of a friendly greeting. Whether pale and wan by study, care, or sickness; or flushed with health and flattering success, we were sure that we should be welcome there. Though the world was cold towards us, yet there was one who always rejoiced in our success, and always was affected in our reverses—and there was a place to which we might go back from the storm which began to pelt us, where we might rest, and become encouraged and invigorated for a new conflict.—So have I seen a bird in its first efforts to fly, leave its nest, and stretch its wings, and go forth to the wide world. But the wind blew it back, and the rain began to fall, and the darkness of night began to draw on, and there was no shelter abroad, and it sought its way back to its nest, to take shelter beneath its mother's wings, and to be refreshed for the struggles of a new day—but then it flew away to think of its nest and its mother no more. But not thus did we leave our home when we bade adieu to it to go forth alone to the manly duties of life. Even amidst the storms that then beat upon us, and the disappointments that we met with, and the coldness of the world, we felt still that there *was* one there who sympathised in our troubles as well as rejoiced in our success, and that, whatever might be abroad, when we entered the door of her dwelling, we should be met with a smile. We expected that a mother, like the mother of Sisera, as she "looked out at her window" waiting for the coming of her son laden with the spoils of victory, would look out for *our* coming, and that our return would renew her joy and ours in our earlier days.

"Oh! in our sterner manhood when no ray
Of earlier sunshine glimmers on our way,
When girt with sin, and sorrow, and the toil

Of cares, which tear the bosom that they soil;
Oh! if there be in retrospection's chain
One link that knits us with young dreams again,
One thought so sweet, we scarcely dare to muse,
On all the hoarded raptures it reviews,
Which seems each instant, in its backward range,
The heart to soften, and its ties to change,
And every spring untouched for years, to move,
It is—THE MEMORY OF A MOTHER'S LOVE!"

It makes a sad desolation when from such a place a mother is taken away—and when, whatever may be the sorrows or the successes in life, she is to greet the returning son or daughter no more. The home of our childhood may be still lovely. The old family mansion; the green fields; the running stream; the moss-covered well; the trees; the lawn; the rose; the sweet-briar, may be there. Perchance too there may be an aged Father, with venerable locks, sitting in his loneliness, with everything to command respect and love, but she is not there. Her familiar voice is not heard. The mother has been borne forth to sleep by the side of her children who went before her, and the place is not what it was. There may be those there whom we much love, but she is not there. We may have formed new relations in life—tender and strong as they can be; we may have another home dear to us as was the home of our childhood, where there is all in affection, kindness, and religion, to make us happy, but *that* home is not what it was, and it will never be what it was again. It is a loosening of one of the cords which bound us to earth—designed to prepare us for our eternal flight from everything dear here below, and to teach us that there is *no* place here that is to be our permanent home.

III I notice a third thing in such an event which is fitted to convey a lesson to the soul such as we always feel in bereavement, but which, like the other things adverted to, has a peculiarity of its own. I refer to a class of emotions often not less painful, and of a much more admonitory character than those which I have adverted to, and which, such are our imperfections in all the relations of life, we are always destined to feel when a friend is removed by death. I mean the quickened recollection of our neglects, of our acts of unkindness, of our ingratitude, of our improper feelings in our intercourse with those whom we have lost.

What I now advert to is one of the most beautiful and benignant laws of our nature—one of the most delicate arrangements to bring our guilt to remembrance in order that we may exercise true repentance, and to prompt us to kindness and fidelity in the remaining relations of life.

This law of our nature, which cannot well be explained except on the supposition that there is a moral government, and that God

designs that *all* our sins shall be brought to our remembrance, is this—that in the death of a friend we instinctively recall the wrongs that we may have done him; for some mysterious power seems to summon them up from the land of forgetfulness, and to cause them to pass in solemn procession before us. Things which we had forgotten; words which we long since uttered but which had passed from the memory; expressions of irritated feeling; unjust suspicions; jealousies; neglect of the respect or the courtesies due in that relation of life; a want of attention when the heart of the friend was sad; want of sympathy in his successes or reverses, all seem to revive as we stand around the open grave, and as the coffin of the friend descends there, they are quickened into life—as the dead man was by the bones of Elisha. *How* this is so, as a matter of moral administration, we may not be able to explain. Perhaps it is because, though conscious in the general that we had erred in that relation, we still hoped that the friend would somehow forgive us—but now he has gone to the grave, and now we can never ask him to pardon us. Perhaps it is that we look on him now as a sufferer—and pity his condition—and *all* his sources of sorrow seem summoned to aggravate his condition, and among others the wrongs that *we* have done arise to our view as a bitter ingredient in his cup of woes. Perhaps it is that God *meant* so to make the conscience that it would not always slumber, and designed that once at least it should do its appropriate work.

This law of our nature has been so beautifully described by one of our best American writers, that I can do nothing so well as to copy his words:—"Oh the grave! the grave! It buries every error, covers every defect, extinguishes every resentment. From this peaceful bosom spring none but fond regrets and tender recollections. Who can look down even upon the grave of an enemy, and not feel a compunctious throb that he ever should have warred with the poor handful of earth that lies mouldering before him? But the grave of those we loved—what a place for meditation! There it is that we call up in long review the whole history of the truth and gentleness, and the thousand endearments lavished upon us, almost unheard in the daily course of intimacy; there it is we dwell upon the tenderness of the parting scene, the bed of death with all its stifled grief, its noiseless attendants, its most watchful assiduities—the last testimonies of expiring love, the feeble, fluttering, thrilling—oh how thrilling is the fluttering pulse—the last fond look of the glazing eye, turning upon us from the threshold of existence; the faint, faltering accent, struggling in death, to give one more assurance of affection. Oh, go to the grave of buried love, and there meditate. There settle the account with thy conscience of every past endearment unregarded of that departed being who never, never can be soothed by contrition. If thou art a child, and hast ever added a sorrow to the soul, or a

furrow to the silvered brow of an affectionate parent—if thou art a husband, and hast ever caused the fond bosom that ventured its whole happiness in thy arms to doubt one moment of thy kindness or thy truth—of if thou art a friend, and hast injured by thought, by word, or deed, the spirit that generously confided in thee—if thou art a lover, and hast ever given one unmerited pang to the true heart that now lies cold beneath thy feet, then be sure that every unkind look, every ungracious word, every ungentle action will come thronging back upon thy memory, and knock dolefully at thy soul; be sure that thou wilt lie down sorrowing and repenting on the grave, and utter the unheard groan, and pour the unavailing tear, bitter because unheard and unavailing."

Who, I may add, ever saw an endeared friend die, and did not feel that there were things in his intercourse with him to regret, and for which he would now desire to ask forgiveness? Who ever saw a man die of whom he had said hard things, or thought hard things, who did not lament that he had given indulgence to such words and feelings? Who ever attended one to the grave—friend or foe, partner or rival, with whom he had been at variance, who did not now wish to have it all buried in oblivion? Who can carry his enmity to the grave? There, when a rival or a foe is laid "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," we lay our animosities aside. There we feel, that whatever may be true of him whom we commit to the tomb, there was much in us that was wrong. And there we regret every unkind word, feel pained at the remembrance of every unkind thought, and mourn that we have done no more to impart happiness to the cold sleeper whom we are to see no more.

I said that this was a beautiful and benignant law of our nature, and though attended like other laws when violated, with pain, the *design* is as apparent as it is beautiful. It has two objects as a part of the divine moral administration. One is, to lead us to repentance for our errors and faults, that we may obtain pardon of our God before it be too late. True, the sleeper there cannot now utter the word of forgiveness. Those lips are for ever sealed in death—and how much would we give now could we *ask* that friend to forgive us! How much would we rejoice could we have the assurance from *those* lips that the faults that now come thronging on our memory *were* forgiven and forgotten, and that they did not add a pang to his last sorrows. But if we cannot now confess the fault in the ear of that friend; if we cannot now hope that those lips will open to declare us forgiven, we may confess the fault to God, and may be assured that *he* will blot the remembrance of it from his book. Around each grave of a friend, therefore, he summons up *groups* of our past offences that we may be humbled and penitent, and may not go unpardoned to eternity.—The other design of this benignant law is, to keep us from offending hereafter; to teach us

to manifest kindness in the remaining relations of life. True, we cannot again injure, or offend, or pain the sleeper there. Whatever may be his condition now, he is where *our* unkindness or neglect will not reach or affect him. But we have other relations in life, perhaps equally tender and equally important. There are other hearts that may be made to bleed by ingratitude, or coldness, or neglect, or mercy, and we may be assured that what has happened in the case of the friend that we have now lost, will happen also in theirs. The design of the law is, to teach us to indulge no thought, to speak no word, to evince no feeling which we would regret when they too are removed. And what a restraint would this be on our temper, our words, our whole deportment!

In each bereavement there is a peculiar group of these painful thoughts that come thronging to the recollection. They are those which are revived by *that* bereavement, but would be unaffected by any other. How many such things there are laid away in the chambers of the soul, now slumbering there like torpid adders, perhaps hereafter to be quickened into life to be our tormenters! The occasion requires me only to allude to that class of emotions which is thus summoned to our recollection on the death of a mother. And who is there of us that can see a mother die without many such painful and disquieting thoughts—greatly embittering the natural grief of parting? Even while we were conscious of having had for her strong and tender love; even when in the main we desired to respect her and to make her happy; even when we know that our general character has been approved by her, and that in life thus far we have not disappointed her fond anticipations, yet how many times in childhood have we been disobedient, how often have we spoken disrespectfully, how often have we disregarded her wishes, how often have we uttered sentiments peevishly that we knew differed from hers; how often have we failed in rendering that prompt and ready obedience which was due to her as a mother, and to her kindness to us; how many times by our perverseness, our self-will, our pride, our obstinacy, have we discouraged her in her efforts to do us good; how often have we done that which would weary out the patience of any one but a parent—and God. Could we hear her speak again, how many things are there which we would wish to confess, and which we would desire her to forgive!

There are lessons flowing from this subject adapted to those who are more particularly interested from having recently been called to this trial—lessons requiring us to submit to God; to be grateful for the example, and counsels, and toils in our behalf of those who have been removed; to imitate them as they imitated their Saviour, and to be prepared to follow them to the world of glory. But on these I will not dwell. There are two thoughts, however, which,

in conclusion, I will suggest, addressed to two classes of my hearers.

(1.) The first relates to those who *have had* pious mothers, who are now removed to heaven, but whose prayers and counsels they have disregarded. I refer to those who have thus far withheld their hearts from that Saviour whom their mother loved, and with whom she now dwells; who who have embraced sentiments such as they know she would not approve; who have made choice of companions such as she lived to warn them against, or who indulge in scenes of revelry and sin such as if she were living you know would break her heart. Go, young man, and walk in the stillness of the evening among the graves. Beneath your feet, in the sacred slumbers of a Christian death, lies a much-loved mother. How calm her slumbers! How sweet the spot! How lovely a mother's grave! How the memory delights to go back to the nursery; the fire-side; the sick bed; the anxious care of a mother! How it loves to recall her gentle look; her eye of love; her kiss at night. At that grave, thoughtless young man, think of thy revels; thy neglect of God; thy forgetfulness of the prayer that she taught thee; thy friendship now for those against whom she warned thee! She sleeps now in death; but from that grave is it fancy that we hear a voice:—'My beloved son! Is this the life that I taught thee to lead? Are these the pleasures which I taught thee to pursue? Did I bear thee, and toil for thee, and pray for thee, and wear out my life, that I might train thee for sin, and death and hell?'

The other thought relates to those who now have a Christian mother—and who yet disregard her living counsels and prayers. I have adverted to a law of our being, beautiful in its nature, but painful in its inflictions. The day is coming when that mother will die. You may see her die; or, far away, you may hear of her death, and may return and visit her grave. Be thou sure that every unkind look, every disobedient action, every harsh word, will come back and visit thy soul. Be sure you will remember everything that ever gave pain to her heart, and remember it with unavailing regret when too late to recall it, or to ask forgiveness. Be sure if you are unkind and disobedient; if you are an infidel or a scoffer; if you slight her counsels and neglect the God and Saviour to whom she would conduct you, there are laid up in the chambers of your soul, the sources of bitter repentance hereafter—and that you cannot find forgiveness of her whose heart you broke, though you seek it carefully with tears. And be sure that the sweetest of all consolations when *she* dies, will be found in such love of her Saviour that you will appreciate what is meant when it it is said *she has gone to Heaven;* and in evidence in your own heart that you will be prepared when the summons comes, to rejoin her in the realms of bliss.

SERMON CCCXCVII.

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DEATH AND IMMORTALITY.

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."—Eccles. xiii. 7.

THIS text contemplates the human body at the point of dissolution. It closes an allegorical description of the gradual decay of our physical powers, until that important crisis is reached, when the soul is separated from the body; the latter descending to the grave, and the former taking its flight to the judgment.

Solomon exhorts us not to postpone the duties of religion, and preparation for death, until those evil days—*i. e.* the period of old age and infirmity—come on, in which we shall say, we have no pleasure in them. He then describes the indications of old age creeping on and shading every prospect which was once so bright and attractive to the youthful eye. Even the sun, moon and stars will be less brilliant. A film will gather over the eye premonitory of the darkness of death. The keepers of the house—the strong and active limbs—shall tremble. The teeth shall fail—the back shall bend, and the ear no longer discriminate between the voice of a bird and the daughters of music. The old man shall be full of fears "He shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way." His head shall blossom white as the almond tree; and the weight of a grasshopper shall prove a burden. Even desire shall fail. Extinguished in the soul are the very impulses to labour and activity. Other minds must now contrive for him, and other hands must supply him. What now remains but for the silver cord to be loosed, and the wheels of nature to break at the fountain! Then all is over. "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who gave it."

I. The first point suggested by the text, on which for a few moments, we may profitably dwell, is, that the soul is here recognised as an existence distinct from the *body*.

Solomon asserts that the body is dust; i. e. a material substance. It is the same essentially as the ground on which we tread. The stroke of death identifies it with dust. Scarcely could it be believed, prior to this event, that our bodies are but clay tenements. Whilst the soul animates them, they seem in every respect dissimilar to the senseless clod. How unlike, in its texture and colour, is the flesh to its kindred dust! The eye, that inlet of beauty and knowledge, from which the light of mind streams and flashes, and the soft silken lock that trembles to the slightest breath, are but finely organized dust. Penetrate the tomb where beauty reposes, and not a trace will you discover of the once admired form. All that can be found are the rotten fragments of its coffin, or the cold black mould it has enriched. Indisputable evidence this, that the body is but organized matter, and is the same essentially as the ground on which we tread! Nature, in this instance, gives her testimony to the truth of revelation. The sacred writer, speaking of the reunion of dust with dust, affirms that it was so originally. The allusion is to that act of creative power by which primeval man came into existence. "The Lord God," says Moses, "formed him," that is his body, "of the dust of the ground." What thus sprung from dust is destined, by a retributive act of divine justice, to return to dust.

But whilst the body is manifestly but organized matter, and must be resolved into its kindred element, the *Soul* on the contrary is a separate existence, immaterial and indestructible.

This is evident from the scriptural account of its creation. The tenor of the narrative, in relation to the formation of the body, is, that the Almighty completed its mechanism ere yet it had the power of life or motion. "He then breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." What language could speak more plainly the separate existence and diverse nature of the soul and the body! The one is a thing of material workmanship. It is constructed entirely out of the dust. The other is not *fabricated* but *inspired*. It was born, if I may so speak, out of the breath of God.

It is a *living* soul; essentially vital, *i. e.*, indestructible. It has neither extension, solidity, nor parts. The causes which operate to dissolve the body can have no such effect, so far as we can see, over the soul. Attentively consider the account given by Moses. It will convince you that in its origin, its nature, and its destiny, the soul is an existence distinct from, and altogether unlike the body. That which came from the breath of the Almighty was more than mere *animal* life. Besides intelligence, it possessed moral affections, boundless capacity, and unspotted holiness. In short, the soul of man was an humble type of its great original, in whose nature there is nothing material, for "God is a Spirit."

Had not sin entered to mar and break down this primeval structure, what a permanent and blissful union would have subsisted between the soul and the body! Without an unlawful or presumptuous stretch of the imagination, we may suppose the soul delighted with her new abode. Its curious workmanship excited her admiration. Its sensitive power over the beauties of creation awakened her wonder. It was a natural and delicate medium of sympathy between herself and the created glories of the universe. Little did she think how soon she was to be driven out of it; and that, by her own criminal act, she was to pull down into the dust this tabernacle of the flesh. Little did she dream, that time would ere long lay his shrivelled hand upon that open brow, and leave there the deep furrows of anxiety; or that death would dim that eye and stiffen those limbs and resolve that body into a mass of putrefaction. But so it was; and so to this day it continues to be. Every hour as the mortal remains of some are heard slowly rumbling through our streets, are we impressed with the truth that "Sin has entered into the world, and that "the wages of sin is death."

But is this the end of man? When you have placed his body in the dust, and shaped the hillock over his grave, is there no more of him? Is this the end? The text says, no. It is but the material part that sleeps in the tomb. "The spirit has appeared before God who gave it." Here then is a direct and positive affirmation of the separate existence of the soul, and of its immaterial, *i. e.*, its indestructible nature. If, in the dissolution of the body, death effects no essential change upon the soul; but simply allows of its departure to the presence of God, it is manifest that the latter cannot be identified in its elementary nature with the body. They go, at death, in different directions. The one goes back to mingle again with its original dust, and the other as an accountable agent, is recalled to the presence of him who gave it existence.

By the dissolution of the body, and the temporary separation of the Soul from it, neither personal identity nor personal responsibility is materially affected, much less annihilated. There is in every human Soul an individual moral stamp, as characteristic as the differing features of the human body. It respects not only the redeemed in contradistinction from the wicked; but also the varying traits and attainments of each individual. Speaking of Abraham, whose body had slept for ages, the scripture says, in proof that his individual soul was recognized as existing in a separate state far away from the slumbering body; "God is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Again. We may consider the body as a mere mechanical structure, adapted to the purposes and circumstances which mark its present state of being.

It is manifestly, in all its parts, arranged with a view to the convenience, use, and enjoyment of the present world. The eye is adapted to receive and transmit the rays of light, so as to form a perfect image near the brain; which image is the medium of perception. In like manner, the lungs are adapted to the air—the ear to sound—the nerves to touch and sensibility—the taste and smell, to food and fragrance. Some of these faculties, it is said, will perform their functions even after the Soul has departed. The eye, for instance, will give an image on the retina, and the ear will vibrate to sound. But *ideas* are no longer received by the image or the vibration. The mansion is deserted.

We grant, that so intimate is the connection in this life between the Soul and the body; so mutually dependent, so sympathetically blended are they; that upon the breaking up of the mortal machinery, from whatsoever cause, the vital principle ceases, and the soul departs.

So far as we can see, there is in the structure of the human body an adaptation to the scenes and circumstances of the present life *only*. There is nothing in its physical organization that points to a future state. Its connection with and its influence over the Soul has, as we shall see, an important bearing on the present responsibility, and future destiny of the latter. It fulfils this mission, and then, by the decree of heaven, it expires. The part which it is to act in a future state requires a new organization, adapting it to a higher and more ethereal medium. Such a change it is destined to undergo. "It is sown a natural body, it will be raised a spiritual body." Its resurrection is practicable by the power of God, and is certain by the promise of God.

But when we consider the nature and properties of the Soul, we at once discover something that has reference to another state of being. If, as in the unconscious brute, there were indications of nothing more than *animal* life; if the habits and propensities of the living agent evinced no traces of immortality, we might well be in doubt as to the separate existence and indestructible nature of the soul. But on this point there *can* be no doubt. There is in man more than mere emphatic life. Between him and the brute creation there is a very broad distinction. From a necessity of his nature, he is obliged to admit moral obligation—to feel himself the subject of praise and blame. He can be impressed with the knowledge of God, and with a sense of accountability. Now, that part of the human nature in which these thoughts, and feelings, and moral impulses dwell, is the human soul. Too subtle for the examination of our senses, it discovers its nature only by its operations and effects. This is the deathless principle in man. Its imperishable nature is neither proved nor disproved by the possession of animal life; but is seen in the scope of its intellect, and in the exercise of its high moral faculties. Organized matter may have animal life; but

mere animal life, is of itself, no proof of immortality. The essential and distinctive attributes of a Soul are found in the higher faculties of reason and moral responsibility.

Whilst therefore we find in the body nothing that indicates a future state—its organization relating only to the circumstances of our earthly condition—we have no reason to wonder, that at death it should return to its kindred dust. And if, in the soul, there were no more indications than there are in the body, of a separate existence and a future state, we might be justified in the conclusion, that men like brute animals died to live no more. But when we find in man, a capacity for unlimited improvement—which the brute has not; when we find a longing after immortality; a conscience or moral faculty; an apprehension of future happiness and misery—neither of which can be predicated of brutes—we are compelled to make a distinction between animal life and the immortal soul. We see at a glance that the soul, unlike the body, is adapted to a future state, and craves a provision for eternity. At present it is an imprisoned chrysalis, its latent energies restricted by the casement that confines it; but the era of its expansion and its liberty is yet to come. Casting off at death its exuviæ, it will develop the strength to suffer or to enjoy, of its own appropriate immortality.

Thus is the soul emphatically the man. It is reasons throne. It is the wild fancy's habitation. It is the only proper subject of praise and blame. Its union with the body though wonderful is not absolutely necessary either to its existence or its activity. It can and it does exist apart from the body. Whilst awaiting the resurrection and reunion of that body, it neither passes through a purgatorial purification, nor sleeps in a dreamy elysium. In scope and activity, its unfettered powers may rival the energies of Lucifer or of Gabriel. Tracing the good man's soul in its flight to eternity we may say with Young—

> "See how it presses on the angel's wing,
> Which is the Seraph, which the child of clay?"

II. The character and responsibility of the soul are affected, in a very important sense, by its union with the body.

It has pleased the Almighty God to place the human soul and body in such close connection with a view not simply to the convenience and pleasure of our present relations; but as a test also of the moral affections. In the original transgression the body we know was the means of exciting the soul to wrong. The forbidden fruit was "pleasant to the eye and good for food." The sensual propensity which ought to have been resisted was indulged. Hence "lust having conceived brought forth sin." And since that fatal event, the body, acting still more powerfully on the soul, is influential in affecting its moral feelings, and so shaping its destiny

for eternity. The abuse of the body to purposes of evil is universal. We make it the instrument "of unrighteousness to sin." We allow it to controul the desires and the affections. We give it more influence than Gods law will justify. Many idolize it; and all by nature and practice are more or less its slaves. Behold the Epicure saying, "What shall I eat and what shall I drink:" and the pleasurist asking for some new excitement of the senses: and the fashionist decorating the body at the expense of the soul: and the libertine converting himself into a brute! All these, by abusing the body, load the soul with deep criminality as it passes on to the limit of its probation.

If the life that now is were the boundary of human existence there might be the shadow of an apology for all this. The voluptuary might riot. Ambition might snatch the laurel reeking with tears and blood. Wealth might build her Babylons, and swell with conscious pride. Men might seize the passing pleasure as they were crowding to the gulfh of annihilation. The alternate laugh of joy and shriek of despair; the shout of drunken debauch and groans of dissolving nature; the song of merriment and the dirge of death might be heard at once, nor produce that shuddering horror which we feel when thinking of the Soul and of its destiny. But the same inspired author who has said, "the spirit shall return unto God who gave it," has declared also "that for all these things God will bring us into judgment."

The character and destiny of the soul in a future state is made to depend on its characteristics in this life. Its inhabitation of the body has much to do in fixing these characteristics, and of course in shaping its eternal destiny. If the body is abused; or preferred to the soul, if its wants and pleasures are consulted more than the interests of the soul, it will inevitably augment the guilt and condemnation of the sinner.

And here we all stand acknowledged culprits even at the bar of conscience. Condemnation rests upon every soul of us. In this respect we have all abused our nature and broken the law of God. And were salvation to depend on our works, not one soul of us could be saved. But, blessed be God, we have a better ground of hope, laid in the merit and sufferings of the Son of God. Wherever and to whomsoever *his* name is made known a new feature is given to human probation. But if this last this only hope be rejected, the sinner dies without remedy. He dies forever.

The term of this probation is, for wise seasons, made shorter in some cases than in others. Three score and ten is the scriptural limit. A few overleap this boundary whilst millions come short of it. Adrift on the current of life, men seldom think that every moment they are forming a character to which death will give immutability. Enters this thought into the bosom of the busy merchant

building his only hopes on this sandy shore? Does the son of pleasure, pampering his idolized body, does *he* reflect that the death-angel is but awaiting the signal to send him horror struck before his God? Look at the careless rejector of the gospel! He throws away his soul, when duty comes in conflict with desire, with a hardihood that challenges the Almighty, and sets at defiance eternal retribution. But is God indifferent to all this? It is true, he is long suffering. He lengthens out their probation. "The sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily." But He has a limit set which they cannot pass. When the sinners cup of iniquity is full, there is a movement among his ministers of wrath; and whilst one is weaving his shroud, and another measuring him for his coffin, the paleness of death gathers upon his face, and he lays himself down to die. This slight indisposition he imagines, will speedily pass away. So think the friends also. But the light talk of hope dies away into suppressed whispers of anxiety, and death, like a nightmare, is seen creeping upon his cold bosom. "The dust must now return to earth as it was, and the spirit must return to God who gave it." There is no discharge in this warfare. Go the Soul must, prepared or unprepared. Inexorable death! He hears no prayer—admits no parley—grants no reprieve. His approach appals the stoutest heart. But why are we afraid of death? Is it because of the pain that precedes the convulsive gasp? Is it the winding sheet—the coffin—the cold damp vault—the mouldering corpse, that so wither up the heart? These have their influence; but these are not all. It is conscious guilt—it is the thought of retribution that curtains the death-bed with its horrors. And what can break their force when eternity is lowering in awful grandeur on the dying eye? There is, thanks be to God, one thing which *can* break their force; but that, alas, in ten thousand instances, has been scorned or neglected. The sinner, rejecting Christ, has ventured to meet the storm *alone*. Horrible is the death of an unbeliever; for he dies "without God and without hope." Then goes the Spirit into the presence of Him who gave it. After death is the judgment. Quick as thought flies the soul to the tribunal of God.

Death, my hearers, is a common event. You can scarce look out of your windows but a funeral train is passing by. The dust is returning to the dust. The soul is pressing on to its final account. To your door the summons will soon come, and the grand question is, are you ready? Is your house in order, your lamp trimmed and burning, your salvation sure?

"What are your hopes beyond the grave,
How stands that dread account?"

Are you straining every energy up to the work of your salva-

tion? Are you subordinating every earthly concern to that of the undying Soul? Are you throwing your affrighted spirits into mercy's arms? Are you smiting the heavens with your cries of anguish? Ah no; the lethargy that precedes death is upon many of you; from which I fear you will awake not, until the terrors of a dying hour apprise you that it is too late for ever. Avert your eyes from this dreadful precipice you cannot. Step by step you are moving towards the brink. Your feet will soon press the crumbling margin. "O for some guardian angel nigh!" O for an arm then to cling to! The body sentenced and sealed, for death, cries to you; prepare. The soul reeking with guilt, shuddering at the thought of eternity—cries out, prepare. Conscience, filing already the vials of wrath, cries, prepare. Heaven with its glories, and Hell with all its horrors, cry out prepare; prepare to meet thy God!

SERMON CCCXCIX.

OBSTACLES TO CONVERSION.

"I pray thee have me excused."—Luke xiv. 18.

There is some reason why every man who hears the gospel is not a Christian. To inquire and ascertain what is the true and exact reason is a matter of solemn importance to each individual. The time and the opportunity for doing this will soon have past by for ever. "There are many persons who think that they wish to be Christians, and yet feel confident that they are not. Why are they not Christians? What is the obstacle which prevents so many from accepting those terms of salvation, which God has offered.

1. Is it that God is unwilling to save them? No! No one dares say so, or even think so. God has removed all doubt upon that point, not only by his invitations and entreaties, but also by his unqualified declaration, "as my soul liveth, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, but that he turn from his way and live."

2. Is it that God has not made suitable provision for the return of all? The atonement, which the Saviour has offered, is so ample, that he can say "whosoever cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Provision is made for all. Salvation is offered to all. Whosoever will believe in the Saviour shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

3. Is it that there are no motives sufficiently powerful to influence to a Christian life? And what more powerful motives, can be conceived of, than those which are urged upon almost every page of the Bible. Eternal happiness is the reward of obedience —eternal wo, the consequence of continued sin.

4. Is it because the sinner is not elected, that he is not saved? The terms of salvation are offered equally to all. And whoever is willing to accept these terms, is elected to everlasting life. They who *will not accept*, and they only, will perish. Forgiveness is offered with the utmost sincerity to every one who will repent, and accept forgiveness for the Saviour's sake.

5. Is the sinner unable to repent? Who will venture to accuse God, of requiring that of us, which we are unable to perform! Every man's judgment rises up at once and condemns him, if for a moment he tries to palliate continuance in sin, by such a thought. Every one knows, not only that he can, but also that he ought to renounce sin, and give his heart to his Maker.

6. Is the duty of repentance neglected, because there are no convictions of sin? Where is the heart which has not felt such convictions? Who has not at times felt the reproaches of conscience? Who in truth must not plead guilty to the charge of having often grieved the Spirit away. Oh how importunate has God been in his strivings with us by his Spirit. We have heard his warning voice in every funeral bell which has tolled—in every dying scene we have witnessed, in every joy that has "crowned our days" and in every pain we have borne. But the voice of conscience we have stifled, and the warnings of the Spirit we have disregarded.

7. Is this world so full of happiness that we have no inducement to look to another world for joy? Every heart knoweth its own bitterness. It is not in poetry alone that this world is described as a "vale of tears." There is in every heart an aching void, which the joys of earth cannot fill. Oh, how constantly is our path through life strewed with disappointed hopes! How often is one *almost* persuaded to be a Christian.

Why then is it, that so many continue unreconciled to God? What are the obstacles so powerful, that the entreaties of God, the sufferings of the Saviour—the strivings of the Spirit, do not remove them. What is it that can induce a man to neglect religion at the hazard of his soul? The things above enumerated, clearly do not stand in the way. Some of the prominent obstacles we will now mention.

1. *An indistinct belief in universal salvation.* Many indulge in a vague impression that all will be saved. This lulls them into security. They think of course that no especial effort is necessary for salvation. Some openly avow this belief. Others secretly cherish it. But whenever it has any hold upon the heart, it seems to deaden conscience, and to lead one to feel that a life of sin is not inconsistent with eternal happiness in heaven. How often does one ward off the arguments and appeals of the pulpit, by the soothing reply, that live as he may, he will eventually be drawn smoothly and pleasantly to blest abodes. While one cherishes this impression, be it ever so vague, ever so indistinct, it is the most effectual preventive of contrition for sin and faith in Christ. With thousands it stands in the way of eternal redemption. Thousands it entices through paths of sinful indulgence to a death-bed of des-

pair and an eternity of wo. They will not enter the door which Christ has opened, because they hope to climb over some other way.

2. *Thoughtlessness*, is another most formidable and most ruinous obstacle. There are thousands in Christian lands, and with intelligent minds, who will never allow themselves time for serious reflection. They enter the church upon the Sabbath, that the sound of the gospel may fall upon the ear, but make no mental effort that its truths may be conveyed to their hearts. They hear the funeral bell, but will not think that they must die. They look upon the cold corpse, but will not by reflection make the case their own. They hear of eternity, but will not send the mind in serious thought to explore its limitless duration, its overwhelming scenes. Most studiously, and most wickedly do they exclude reflection, and are borne as bubbles on the deceitful surface of life's gliding stream. O how strange it is that any mind can refrain from reflection, when placed in the scenes which now surround us. Death is certain. The grave is the termination of all our earthly hopes. The trump of the Archangel will soon burst upon the ear. The resurrection morn will soon gleam upon the eye. The eternal glories of heaven will soon fill the heart with rapture, or the glooms of hell, pervade it with undying despair. And yet men will not think! How strange! How incomprehensible! *They will not think*, and therefore by thousands they are perishing to be eternal outcasts from heaven.

3. *A wrong view of the mercy of God*, is another source of ruin, not uncommon in the world. It is not very unusual for persons to think that God is so merciful that he will not be strict in his requirements. But can God receive to heaven those who will not repent of sin, and who will acquire no taste for heaven's purity and heaven's joy. Can those, who here never will bow the knee to Jesus—never will speak his praise, be admitted to those blest abodes, where he reigns supreme, where every knee bows at the mention of his name, and every heart thrills at the remembrance of his love. "I cast myself upon the mercy of God for salvation," said a hardened and impenitent and dying sinner. Oh what infatuation. The goodness of God should lead to repentance; if it does not, it never can be manifested in our salvation. The only way to be saved is the way which God has pointed out.

4. Another obstacle far from uncommon, is *a desire to obtain a new heart in a different way from that in which alone the Bible assures us a new heart can be obtained.* Such persons will wish they were Christians. They will try to feel interested in serious things. They will attend church—go to funerals, and place themselves

under the influence of all the means of grace. They will read the Bible, and occasionally try the efficacy of prayer. And thus they are hoping that they shall eventually obtain a new heart. They will do anything but just that very thing which God tells them to do, "cease to do evil, learn to do well." They will do anything but repent of sin, seek forgiveness in the name of Jesus, and at once commence a life of prayer, and of active effort. Thousands thus go on through life. While in this state of mind they know it is sinful, and conscience reproaches them every day. This is not a state of innocent ignorance. They know that the path to heaven is plain and strait; that we are to make no compromise with sin; that at once we must enter upon all the duties of the Christian life, with prayer for strength to persevere to the end.

5. The unwillingness to give up a worldly spirit, is another obstacle which ruins thousands. Every man's common sense teaches him, that supreme attachment to anything of an earthly nature is inconsistent with the requirements of the gospel. Every man in heart knows that if he would be a Christian, he must make it the one great object of life to prepare for heaven and to reclaim a guilty world to God. And in almost every bosom, there is a struggle, *arduous*, though it be hidden, between the claims of religion and the allurements of the world. How often will the ambitious, and the worldly, and the gay, confess the emptiness of their pursuits, and express regret that they are not walking in the Christian's path. Ah this is the confession, which conscience, that faithful monitor, will at times extort from the tortured bosom. And yet will the infatuated votary of the world glide along, through empty and heartless joys, till the lamentation is upon his lips, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved."

6. Pride, or an unwillingness to confess being in the wrong, is another obstacle which ruins thousands. Nothing is harder for the unsubdued heart, than the sincere open confession of having lived in sin, and of needing forgiveness. The attitude which the sinner assumes practically and really is, that God must confess that he has been wrong in his requirements, and yield to the stubborness of the sinner's heart. But few have the hardihood to say this in words, while thousands have the effrontery to exhibit it in their lives. Every man who does not cry for mercy is exhibiting this feeling to God. It is impossible to deceive our own hearts by denying this, for we must either admit that we have done wrong, or accuse God of injustice in requiring contrition and confession. This pride of heart must be subdued, even to the lowly spirit of a little child, or there can be no admission to God's courts above.

Such are some of the principal obstacles which stand in the way of the conversion of the sinner. The path to wo is downward, and its passage rapid. No effort is necessary to hasten along

its crowded ways. The current bears you onward, and you need but float upon its surface, and you will soon enter those gloomy depths, whence there is no return. The obstacles in the way of conversion are powerful. They are not to be overcome by the transient feeling of a moment; they are not to be removed by waiting in indolence. They demand great effort to overcome them. If there be anything in nature which calls for strenuous exertions, and which holds out sufficient motives to encourage such exertions, it is the salvation of your soul. Oh, do you ever think of that eternity which is before you, of those realms of boundless space, where in a short time must be your endless home? Do you ever think of the wonders of a Saviour's love, of the sympathy of celestial bands, of the glittering mansion, of the heavenly robe, of the everlasting song. Can you think of such things, and not have your heart burn within you, and not be impelled by desires, which never can be extinguished, to reach forward by every possible exertion, to the attainment of that world? "Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you."